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PREMIER'S COUNCIL  
ON THE STATUS OF  
PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES

Annual Report 2004/2005

Alberta



THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL  
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



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## Letter of Transmittal

March 31, 2005

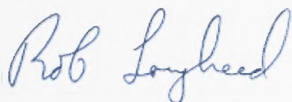
**The Honourable Ralph Klein**

Premier of Alberta  
307 Legislature Building  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5K 2B6

Dear Honourable Premier:

I have the honour to present the sixteenth Annual Report of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This report covers the activities undertaken by your Council during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005. It is submitted in accordance with the provision of s.7 (1) of the *Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act* for your presentation to the Legislative Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Lougheed". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

**Rob Lougheed, MLA**

Strathcona Constituency  
Chair, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities



## Letter from the Minister

As the Minister of Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, I appreciate the insight and advice provided by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities to ensure all Albertans have the opportunity to participate in our communities.



The Premier's Council is effective because the members work closely with the disability community to ensure Albertans' voices are heard when the province is developing and delivering support programs and services.

I thank the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and Chair Rob Lougheed, MLA Strathcona, for their commitment to Albertans with disabilities throughout 2004/2005, and for their continued role in ensuring they get the supports and services they need.

**Yvonne Fritz**  
Minister



## Message from the Chair

I have the honour to once again present the Annual Report of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This report covers the activities undertaken by the Premier's Council during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005, and as you will discover, it was another busy year.

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities hosted a **Disability Community Symposium** in Red Deer on June 17 & 18, 2004. The Premier's Council invited presentations from approximately 45 provincial organizations involved with disability issues to attend the symposium. The purpose of the two-day gathering was to provide an opportunity for disability community leaders to discuss the future role of the Premier's Council and community expectations of the newly created Office for Disability Issues (ODI).



The ODI is the mechanism through which the provincial government will implement many of the recommendations contained within the *Alberta Disability Strategy* produced in 2002 by the Premier's Council. The symposium's roundtable discussions and conclusions provided important counsel and direction to ODI staff, and to the Premier's Council. A summary report was produced and sent to all participants.

The newly created ODI grew over the past year. In addition to the Director, a Manager of Policy Development, a Manager of Strategic Planning, a Coordinator for the Premier's Council, and an Administration Assistant were hired to complete the ODI team.

On December 3, 2004, the Premier's Council joined six communities across the province to host celebrations of the International Day of Disabled Persons. Margaret Conquest represented the Premier's Council in presenting Awards of Excellence and the Gary William McPherson Award at the Edmonton event. I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to all of the award recipients.

In January 2005, the Premier's Council embarked on an extensive campaign to recruit new Council members. Approximately 200 applications were received to fill the 14 available positions. Thirty-five interviews were conducted, and 11 new members will be appointed to the Premier's Council in May 2005. Along with myself as Chair, three members will be reappointed to give continuity to the work of the Premier's Council.

I want to thank Premier's Council members and staff for all their efforts over the past year. It is this team effort that will help us continue on the path to full inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Sincerely,

**Rob Lougheed, MLA**

Strathcona Constituency

Chair, Premier's Council on the Status for Persons with Disabilities



## Highlights of 2004/2005

Over the last year, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities has continued to work towards the achievement of full citizenship for Albertans with disabilities. Council members coordinate and participate in various activities guided by the *Alberta Disability Strategy*. (see Appendix 1).

### Disability Community Symposium

As part of its ongoing commitment to represent the interests of persons with disabilities, the Premier's Council has been connecting with the disability community over the past year. The Premier's Council held a Disability Community Symposium in Red Deer on June 17 and 18, 2004. Forty-six organizations were invited to participate in the two-day event, and a total of 67 participants shared their perspectives.

Symposium activities included small group discussions and a large plenary meeting. Topics discussed at the symposium centred on the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) — what community expectations exist, what challenges and issues can be foreseen, and what opportunities for collaboration can be pursued — and on the future role of the Premier's Council. For a summary of symposium input, see the *What We Heard From the Community* section.

### International Day of Disabled Persons

On December 3, 2004 International Day of Disabled Persons was recognized across Alberta. The theme for 2004 was *A Voice of Our Own*, a message aimed at reminding people that persons with disabilities should be given a voice in programs, policies and decisions that affect them.

Events were held in cities such as Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and Medicine Hat. The Premier's Council prepared posters, bookmarks and brochures that were distributed across the province to encourage Albertans to get involved in making full citizenship a reality for all.

The celebrations included Awards of Excellence presented on behalf of the Premier's Council. The Premier's Council Awards of Excellence honour the contributions of Dr. Gary McPherson, and was created last year to highlight the outstanding work of individuals or organizations that, like Dr. McPherson, enhance or enrich the lives of persons with disabilities. Recipients Cindy Gordon, Dick Bellamy, and the Children's Ability Fund were recognized for their commitment in the areas of education, employment, community/citizenship and public awareness.



## AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE 2004

### **Cindy Gordon Gary McPherson Award**

Ms. Gordon was honoured for her outstanding leadership in enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities. Ms. Gordon is a professional rehabilitation practitioner who has focused much of her career on educating the public about hearing loss, and helping the hearing impaired lead independent and fulfilling lives. Her dedication and boundless energy as a professional and volunteer have made Alberta, and particularly Edmonton, a more inclusive and accessible place.

Ms. Gordon's dedication, leadership and perseverance have resulted in many organizations modifying their operations to increase accessibility. Her latest effort involves founding a non-profit organization committed to providing support and overcoming communication barriers for people experiencing speech or hearing challenges.

### **Dick Bellamy Award of Excellence**

Mr. Bellamy was honoured for his special contribution in the area of employment. During his 23 years as a career counsellor, Mr. Bellamy has inspired hundreds of people with disabilities to pursue higher education, obtain job skills, and seek employment. Just as important, he instilled in them the confidence, self-assurance, and greater independence needed to get and keep a job.

Mr. Bellamy's guidance, compassion and encouragement have helped many people overcome their fears and self-doubts and go on to successful, productive lives. Mr. Bellamy is an outstanding role model to both colleagues and clients, and is well known for his ability to obtain the supports clients needed to succeed on the job.

### **Children's Ability Fund Award of Excellence**

The Children's Ability Fund was honoured for its significant contribution to creating barrier free, inclusive environments within many Alberta communities. In 1996, the Children's Ability Fund launched a Barrier Free Playground Project. Its target was to build 50 new playgrounds that could be used by children of all abilities within Edmonton and northern Alberta.

Grants were made available to communities interested in building accessibility into local playgrounds. An overwhelming response led to the expansion of the target to 100 playgrounds. That goal was achieved on June 18, 2003 in Edmonton at St. Edmund's School. The project has provided opportunities for children of varying abilities to play side-by-side and has created awareness and an appreciation of accessibility.

## Help Make A Difference Campaign

The Premier's Council assisted in the development of the *Help Make a Difference* human rights campaign. This initiative used public service announcements and a website to promote greater awareness of the issues around discrimination and inclusion faced by persons with disabilities, women and other Albertans.

Some specific campaign contributions made by the Premier's Council were partial funding and the

review and editing of television public service announcements (PSAs). In addition, Austin Mardon and Marlin Styner, who will be joining the Premier's Council as new members in the coming year, were featured in the PSAs.

View the segments televised on Global Television's Alberta networks and explore the website at [www.helpmakeadifference.com](http://www.helpmakeadifference.com)

## Looking Ahead

Recruitment of new Premier's Council members began late in this fiscal year and more than 200 individuals from around the province applied. Interviews with 35 individuals followed, and from these, 11 new members will be chosen.

New members will be appointed on the basis of their cross-disability perspective, knowledge of disability issues, ability to work in a team, and commitment to the Premier's Council's mission, vision, and guiding principles. Following these appointments, a strategic planning session will be held in June. See Appendix II for 2004/2005 Council member bios.

Chair Rob Lougheed and members Shirley Dupmeier, Judy Hellevang, and Linette Kelly are looking forward to meeting with new members and beginning their 2005/2006 planning work.

New members will be profiled on the Premier's Council website. Their bios will be posted at [www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/CSS/premiers\\_council/people/Council\\_Members.asp](http://www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/CSS/premiers_council/people/Council_Members.asp)



# What We Heard From the Community

## Community Contacts

People with disabilities express their issues and concerns to the Premier's Council throughout the year. One of the responsibilities of Premier's Council staff is to listen to these questions and comments, respond to them in the most appropriate and helpful way, and then relay these concerns to government.

People who have contacted the Premier's Council office in the past year include people with

disabilities, family members, helping professionals, advocates, researchers, and business owners.

In 2004/2005, questions and comments regarding financial supports continued to motivate the highest percentage of community contacts. As in previous years, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) remains the focal point for inquiries related to financial supports. Other calls received pertained to housing, accessibility, education and learning, employment, community supports, and transportation.

## Disability Community Symposium Summary

The Disability Community Symposium, held in June 2004, was well received by the disability community. The participants provided their thoughts and input into the future role of the Premier's Council and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI). Community expectations of the ODI were varied and wide-ranging, but communication was a central theme. Participants saw the ODI playing a major role in communicating and raising awareness within government of disability issues and needs. They also stated that the ODI should act as a liaison between government and community stakeholders.

Participants identified several potential challenges for the ODI. These included meeting high community expectations with limited resources; having credibility and influence within government; clearly defining and communicating the ODI's role, protocols, processes, and plans; recognizing all disability groups equally and in a manner that is inclusive; and developing effective communication links with community groups.

With respect to opportunities for collaboration, symposium participants envisioned the ODI building partnerships with community organizations and private sector companies to resolve disability issues,

engaging in joint advocacy, and creating or enhancing communication links and information sharing. The symposium provided a good setting for gathering input from such organizations. Participants said regular face-to-face forums of this nature should continue.

When discussing the Premier's Council's future, participants expressed support for the Premier's Council and encouraged it to continue as an advisor to government on disability issues. Some supported the Premier's Council acting in a formal capacity as an advisory board to the ODI. Although participants acknowledged that the ODI would largely be responsible for implementing the *Alberta Disability Strategy (ADS)*, it was felt that the Premier's Council should monitor the progress of the *ADS* to ensure recommendations were being acted upon.

Several participants believed that ensuring government accountability for policies and programs is a legitimate role for the Premier's Council.

The symposium yielded a wonderful breadth of input and participants gave the symposium a very positive review, expressing their hope that this might be the first of more regular symposiums.



## Update on the Office for Disability Issues

Since its inception last year, the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) has been busy. The small team of planning and program experts was established to better coordinate government policies and programs that affect Albertans with disabilities. In addition to this first task, the ODI provides support to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The ODI develops and implements policies to remove barriers and create accessible programs and services across government departments. For example, a representative from the ODI currently sits on the Safety Codes Council and chairs its Barrier-Free Design Sub-committee.

In August 2004, the ODI worked with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission on a publication called the *Duty To Accommodate Students with Disabilities In Post-secondary Educational Institutions*. The ODI also partnered with Alberta Advanced Education in a review of post-secondary education for Albertans with disabilities. The final report entitled *The Future Starts with Youth* was released in the summer of 2004.

The ODI is currently preparing a document profiling Albertans with disabilities and has developed an e-newsletter which covers disability issues, locally, nationally and beyond.

In the spring of 2005, the ODI partnered with the Alberta Restaurant and Food Association (ARFA) to make restaurants more welcoming to people with disabilities. To demonstrate what steps could be taken, a Braille menu was developed with the Chateau Lacombe Hotel and presented to the Chair of the Premier's Council at the ARFA annual general meeting in April.

The ODI is now working to bring ministries together to develop a formal response to the *Alberta Disability Strategy*.



## Appendix I:

# Alberta Disability Strategy Major Recommendations

In the *Alberta Disability Strategy*, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities made 168 recommendations concerning policies, programs and initiatives affecting the lives of persons with disabilities. These recommendations are contained in the companion document *Alberta Disability Strategy Core Supports and Appendices*. The Premier's Council believes that implementation of these recommendations will enable all Albertans to fully participate in all aspects of Alberta society. There are, however, several major recommendations that the Premier's Council believes are priorities for action.

Common to all of the recommendations is a demand for government to better coordinate and enforce policies and programs impacting persons with disabilities. Lack of coordination and interdepartmental cooperation results in many departments and agencies offering services that are not complementary, overlap or are in conflict with each other. The government currently has legislation in place that was created to remove many access and involvement barriers. However, poor enforcement of policies and regulations, such as Building Code standards, means persons with disabilities continue to face major restrictions, challenges, and frustrations in their daily lives.

### 1. AWARENESS

Albertans should be made more aware of the rights, needs, and aspirations of persons with disabilities.

Attitudinal and systemic barriers add significantly to the daily challenges faced by Albertans with disabilities. Preconceived attitudes, inappropriate behaviours, and limited expectations among the general public and service providers prevent persons with disabilities from achieving their full potential. Such barriers hit Aboriginals with disabilities particularly hard, as they also face other systemic impediments related to their heritage and culture.

Social marketing programs in health promotion, such as AADAC's anti-drug campaign, have proven effective. It is recommended a similar approach be introduced across the province to emphasize the abilities and untapped potential of persons with

disabilities. This general public awareness should be supported by communications and promotion targeting key audiences such as employers, government workers, the hospitality industry and others.

### 2. SUPPORTS FOR DAILY LIVING

The Government of Alberta must ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities related to their daily living activities are met.

Personal care, communication, shelter, and mobility are fundamental needs most Albertans take for granted. But Albertans with disabilities need daily living supports to participate in recreational, social, employment, or learning activities. Without basic support, and the assurance that this support will be provided, many disabled Albertans cannot be a part of the community.

Alberta has a wide variety of programs in place to help Albertans overcome barriers and be more independent. However, these programs are largely uncoordinated, often inadequate and difficult to access. Private services are expensive and beyond the reach of most individuals and their families.

Access to adequate, affordable technical aids and equipment, personal services such as home care and other aids to daily living, transportation, and accessible housing must be assured if persons with disabilities are to develop their abilities and have equal opportunities to be involved in everyday life.



### 3. PHYSICAL ACCESS

A commitment to embrace the principles of universal accessibility is needed, as well as a process to remove physical barriers from public spaces so that all Albertans can fully participate in all community, employment, and business activities.

For many, the inability to gain access to buildings or other environmental spaces and/or move about with reasonable ease, often limits their ability to equitably participate in activities related to citizen engagement, employment or business and commerce. Current building codes are often inadequate to guard against developers, builders, employers, and even government from seeking exclusions and ducking their responsibilities to proactively address access issues.

To participate fully, persons with disabilities need to be able to get to and move about the community as freely and unencumbered as any citizen. It is understood that there are reasonable limits to access, but these should be defined by the nature of the environment, not by a property owner or manager. Not every environment can be made accessible to a wheelchair or made safe for a person with a visual impairment to navigate alone, but it must be done wherever and whenever such access is possible.

Government alone could go a long way in achieving and demonstrating the value of inclusion by incorporating accessibility as a basic principle in the design and construction of public spaces. A government commitment to assess, plan and respond to the issue of access in all public spaces — as a provider of services and as a prospective employer — would send a strong message to the public regarding the importance of enabling all Albertans to fully participate in a broad spectrum of activities.

### 4. APPEALS SYSTEM

Government's current appeals system should be governed by the rules of administrative law (quasi-judicial) and be more transparent and respectful of the needs of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities have concerns about the effectiveness and fairness of the appeal process in a number of government departments, agencies, commissions and authorities. Although Canadian and Alberta laws guarantee equality and protection from discrimination, many Albertans often cannot obtain support or services without going through complex and drawn out appeals.

The appeal systems fail to recognize the additional difficulties individuals face in understanding the issues, accessing the systems and working effectively through the processes. It is important that government programs for persons with disabilities have speedy, objective, independent, transparent and advocate-supported appeal processes.

### 5. COMMUNITY SUPPORTS MODEL

The Government of Alberta should create a single, province-wide program that integrates current disability support programs and funding under one philosophy and set of criteria. This community support model would provide individualized support, enabling persons with disabilities to have choice in the marketplace and independently make decisions about their needs and service providers.

All three levels of government have a responsibility to develop, organize, fund and deliver programs for persons with disabilities. There is a pressing need for better coordination, a more comprehensive approach, and a model that ensures safety and security, self-determination, individualized funding and community inclusion for all Albertans.

Users need more involvement in designing programs and services and deciding what will best meet their individual needs. Transition from one part of the province to another, or from one government program to another, should be seamless. The community supports model would help to fill gaps and inadequacies in existing service arrangements.

This model, which is similar to one recommended by the Premier's Council in a 1990 action plan, would envelope all government departments and regional authorities that provide services to persons with disabilities.

## 6. LEARNING

The Government of Alberta should improve access to education for persons with disabilities, by linking and integrating education resources, setting standards for special education programs, ensuring all education facilities are physically accessible, reviewing the enrolment appeal process at schools, expanding counselling support, and monitoring implementation of the recommendations of Alberta Learning's Review of Special Education in Alberta.

The *Alberta School Act* guarantees that all children in Alberta will have access to an education system that addresses their unique needs. Despite this legislated right, students with disabilities continue to face fragmented and uncoordinated services, funding issues, unfair appeal processes, and inadequate staff training and support. These barriers block efforts to obtain a suitable primary, secondary, or post-secondary education.

Studies have shown a clear link between a person's level of education and the likelihood of finding employment or living in poverty. Education levels for Albertans with disabilities are lower than population norms. Improving learning opportunities for all Albertans and providing adequate learning supports and resources will enable individuals with disabilities to fulfill their potential and increase their economic and social independence.

## 7. INCOME SUPPORT

The Government of Alberta should separate income support programs from personal support programs, so that persons with disabilities are not automatically penalized for earning an income and becoming part of the workforce.

Currently, eligibility for personal supports like home care, living aids, and access to transportation are tied to income status. Government income support programs such as Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) are connected to services that help provide for basic living needs, but these are lost once a person becomes employed or otherwise ineligible for an income support program. Personal supports, therefore, are often viewed as charity for impoverished people, rather than a support for independent living.

The ability to pay for one's own basic needs does not take into account that a person with a disability still needs personal supports to maintain work status or continue to participate in community life. Also, it does not recognize that the cost for a person with a disability to maintain a standard of living comparable to a non-disabled Albertan is substantially higher.

The fear of losing invaluable personal supports once employed is a training or work disincentive for many Albertans with disabilities. More people would be encouraged to seek economic independence if this fear was removed.

## 8. EMPLOYMENT

Alberta employers and governments should provide long-term support and commitment to persons with disabilities attempting to enter the workforce and to participate on public boards, commissions, or committees.

Significant time and effort is needed to create and sustain job opportunities for persons with disabilities and to make them "employment ready". An appropriate level of employment support does not currently exist in Alberta, and existing programs are not well coordinated.

To achieve integrated employment supports, more on-going partnerships among people with disabilities, service organizations, corporations, and governments are required. To meet the holistic needs of persons with disabilities, government departments must work more closely together to integrate services like income support, home care, career counselling and job training. Employment support programs must also move beyond job preparation/search and look to meeting basic workplace needs such as transportation, physical access and on the job integration.

**To view the full Alberta Disability Strategy document, please visit [www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/css/premiers\\_council/ads/index.asp](http://www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/css/premiers_council/ads/index.asp)**



## Appendix II: 2004/2005 Council Members

### GORDON BULLIVANT

Calgary's Gordon Bullivant has been active in the special needs community for over 30 years. He was the Chair of the Learning Committee and a member of the Full Citizenship Committee for the development of the *Alberta Disability Strategy*. He is the past president of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada and continues as the Chair of the National Legal Committee and member of the Professional Advisory Committee. An active member of the Calgary Stakeholders Group for Learning Disabilities, Gordon represented the Premier's Council on the Advisory Committee for Alberta Learning's Review of Special Education.

Gordon is the executive director of the Foothills Academy, a centre for children with Learning Disabilities. It is internationally recognized for its expertise in teaching techniques, research and practical application of program needs to children and youth with learning disabilities and/or Attention Deficit Disorder.

### SHIRLEY DUPMEIER

Shirley Dupmeier of Medicine Hat has been re-appointed to the Premier's Council for a second term. She was a member of the Financial Committee and the Personal Supports Committee developing the *Alberta Disability Strategy*. She has extensive experience working with issues surrounding visual impairment and other disabilities and is a liaison with many disability organizations in Medicine Hat.

### GERALD GORDEY

Gerald Gordey, formerly of Vegreville and now an Edmonton resident, was Chair of the *Alberta Disability Strategy's* Financial Supports Committee. He has a long history of community involvement and has contributed to many disability organizations as an advisor or volunteer. Gerald has been a County Councillor, School board chair, representative on the Vegreville Health Unit Board, and advisory member of a voluntary hospital board. He has served on the board of directors for Edmonton Social Services for the Disabled, Alberta Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled, Alberta Special Olympics and the Handicapped Hunter Review Committee. Gerald is the former chair of VALID (Vegreville Association for Living in Dignity), a volunteer organization providing services to persons with disabilities in the Vegreville region.

### JUDY HELLEVANG

Judy Hellevang of Calgary is a member of the Full Citizenship Committee and the Learning Committee working towards the implementation of the *Alberta Disability Strategy*. As a volunteer, Judy has been associated with the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre (DDRC) of Calgary for 19 years. She supports the board and facilitates DDRC's Advisory Committee, which is made up of people with developmental disabilities. Judy has been an advocate for many people with disabilities and continues to promote their rights.



### LINETTE KELLY

Linette Kelly of Calgary is a public representative on the Students Finance Appeal Committee and past director of Project 118 Children Services Society. She has served on many volunteer committees as a fundraiser, including an annual benefit for the Calgary Homeless Foundation. She has been an advocate for persons with developmental disabilities for many years and is an active caregiver for a sibling who has a developmental disability. Linette is an executive assistant and corporate secretary for a Calgary consulting firm.

### JIM KILLICK

Jim Killick of Legal was Chair of the Coordinating Committee for the *Alberta Disability Strategy*, as well as Chair of the Personal Supports Committee and member of the Employment Supports Committee. Jim has been actively involved in the field of community rehabilitation in the province for approximately 20 years in the areas of counselling, program development, and administration. He is presently working with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and continues to be involved as a participant in numerous community associations working towards removing the barriers facing persons with disabilities.

### CARRIELYNN LAMOUCHE

Ms. Lamouche is a Métis consultant from Gift Lake, one of Alberta's eight Métis settlements. She possesses a degree from the Royal Conservatory of Music and a Master's degree in Social Work. An Aboriginal person with disabilities, she works with governments in the area of social programming. She also assists governments, businesses and educational institutions to identify and remove barriers that prevent or discourage persons with disabilities from full participation in the community. Among her extensive committee work are the Aboriginal Healing Foundation Board, the Provincial Human Rights Multicultural Education Fund Advisory Committee and the Canadian Institute of Health Research Ethics Standing Committee.

### MARGARET MACCABE CONQUEST

Margaret MacCabe Conquest of Edmonton was Chair of the Employment Committee and sat on the Personal Supports Committee, both in support of developing the *Alberta Disability Strategy* and improving the status of people with disabilities. Margaret has a Masters of Science in the Health Promotion program at the University of Alberta. She studied the impact of acquired disability and rehabilitation services on the sexual health of women with spinal cord injuries and continues to chair or present at national and provincial conferences. She is actively involved in therapeutic recreation programs and health promotion for persons with disabilities.



Suite 1110, HSBC Building  
10055 – 106 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 2Y2

Ph: (780) 422-1095  
or toll free 1-800-272-8841

[www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/CSS/premiers\\_council](http://www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/CSS/premiers_council)

E-mail: [pcspd@gov.ab.ca](mailto:pcspd@gov.ab.ca)